

# A chance to support DUI task forces

**F**or nearly 30 years, the Missoula County DUI Task Force has been bringing Missoulians of all walks of life together to fight against drunken driving. Like the 33 other state-approved DUI task forces in Montana, it does this by waging education campaigns, providing responsible alcohol sales and service training, and by promoting programs that offer people a way to get home safely if they've had too much to drink.

And it does all this on a budget of less than \$100,000 a year, raised entirely through the collection of fees paid by DUI offenders when their licenses are reinstated.

It's a good bet that many more Missoulians would be willing to lend their financial support to such a worthy – and effective

## CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR

Find your state legislators' direct contact information online at <http://leg.mt.gov>, or by calling the Information Desk at the Montana Capitol at 406-444-4800. Mail can also be addressed to individual senators at the Montana Senate, P.O. Box 200500, Helena, MT 59620-0500; or to individual representatives at the Montana House of Representatives, P.O. Box 200400, Helena, MT 59620-0400.

– endeavor. Fortunately, this legislative session a state representative from Missoula has introduced legislation to make that possible.

Rep. Bryce Bennett, a Missoula Democrat representing House District 91, introduced House

Bill 202 to help raise additional funding for county task forces in Montana by allowing people to make a donation when registering a vehicle. The voluntary option would provide the option of giving \$1 or more to county DUI task forces.

Current law already allows those registering a vehicle to choose to donate to organ donation awareness and traumatic brain injury awareness. Adding the option of financially supporting county DUI task forces seems sensible and relevant.

After all, Montanans with registered vehicles have a strong incentive to make Montana's roads as safe as possible, and county DUI task forces share that goal. Task forces in recent years have been able to note some measure of success as the

overall rate of alcohol-related vehicle crashes declined.

Like Montana's rate, Missoula's rate of alcohol-involved vehicle accidents has been trending downward. According to the latest report for fiscal year 2014, Missoula County logged a total of 282 such crashes in 2009, for a rate of more than 11 percent. The next year, 2010, saw 237 crashes, for a rate closer to 10 percent, and by 2011, the number had fallen to 195 – a rate of less than 9 percent. This steady decrease is a good indication that the dollars invested in this task force are working

That's the good news. The bad news is that the reduced number of crashes did not correspond to a reduced number of fatalities. In 2009, there were seven alcohol-related fatalities. In 2010, there

were eight. And in 2011, there were seven.

That's too many for our county of less than 112,000 residents. Indeed, despite improvement in Montana's alcohol-related fatality rate, it remains one of the highest rates in the nation.

HB 202 is scheduled for its first hearing with the House Transportation Committee on Friday, Jan. 23. Let the members of the House Transportation committee know that you support the option to help support county DUI task forces.

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## DUI TASK FORCES

### Bill will allow financial support

Montana consistently ranks as one of the worst states in the nation for its high percentage of fatalities due to drunken driving. We are too tolerant of the heartbreaking toll that drunken driving takes on our community, and it's time we made a serious effort to keep drivers safe.

Last April my two sons, who were coming back from spring break, were almost hit by a drunken driver going the wrong way on Interstate 90. Parents should not have to worry every time we get behind the wheel that we, or our loved ones, could be the next statistic.

Rep. Bryce Bennett, House District 91, has proposed a bill to add a check-off to motor vehicle registrations to provide additional funding for statewide DUI task forces. I serve on the Missoula County DUI Task Force and know what a great job they do promoting public safety with limited funds. You've probably seen the billboards and heard the ads reminding people not to drink and drive, especially during holidays and prom and graduation weekends, when the risks increase. Young drivers, especially, need to be constantly reminded that it is never safe to drink and drive.

This Friday, HB 202 will be heard before the House Transportation Committee. It's vitally important if you are in favor of this bill that you contact the committee by sending an online message or testify in person at 3 p.m. in room 455 of the Capitol building in Helena. The check-off, which is strictly voluntary, will not cost taxpayers any money and will allow those motorists in favor of increased highway safety to vote with their pocketbooks.

To access a link to send an online message to the committee, click on <http://leg.mt.gov/css/Sessions/64th/legweb-session.asp> and fill out the form or call (406) 444-0400.

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